

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 14528

FOL TEL SENT ACTION IMMEDIATE BANGKOK FROM CHIANG MAI DATED
JULY 1, 1977 REPEATED FOR YOUR INFO

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CHIANG MAI 240

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: SNAR, TH, BM
SUBJ: LOCAL REACTIONS TO RELEASE OF BPP PARU AND HELICOPTER

1. SUMMARY: NOW THAT THE BURMESE HAVE RELEASED THE SEIZED
BPP HELICOPTER AND 30 TROOPS, THAI REACTIONS IN THE NORTH
TO THE ENTIRE AFFAIR ARE SOMEWHAT MUTED. LOCAL COMMANDERS
ARE WILLING TO ADMIT THAT THE INCIDENT WAS PARTLY A RESULT
OF THAI ERRORS AND THERE ARE RENEWED EXPRESSIONS OF THAI-
BURMESE FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION AGAINST NARCOTICS
TRAFFICKERS. STILL, THE INCIDENT'S TOTAL IMPACT DID HURT
RELATIONS AND MAY CREATE SOME RELUCTANCE TO PARTICIPATE
IN FUTURE OPERATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. NOW THAT THE IMMEDIATE CRISIS IS OVER, LOCAL THAI
OFFICIALS VIEW THE SEIZURE OF THE BPP HELICOPTER ITS CREW AND 27
PARU IN A MORE REASONABLE LIGHT THAN THEY DID IMMEDIATELY
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AFTER THE FACT. ALTHOUGH THE INCIDENT SUGGESTS TO
MANY THAIS THAT THEY HAVE BEEN RIGHT ABOUT THE BURMESE ALL
ALONG, THE FACT THAT THE HELICOPTER AND MEN HAVE BEEN
SAFELY RETURNED HAS ENDED THE CRISIS ATMOSPHERE AND
PROMPTED A MUCH MORE OBJECTIVE JUDGEMENT OF THE INCIDENT.
LOCAL COMMANDERS, INCLUDING GENERAL WICHAI WICHAITHANAPHAN,
HAVE RENEWED EXPRESSIONS OF FRIENDSHIP FOR THE BURMESE

AND PROMISED TO GO ALL OUT FOR THE SUA NARCOTICS TILL
PRESUMED HIDDEN IN THAILAND. THERE IS THE RECOGNITION
THAT IT WAS AFTER ALL A BPP NAVIGATIONAL ERROR THAT LED
TO THE INCIDENT IN THE FIRST PLACE.

3. THE SEIZURE AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS DO HOWEVER REPRESENT
A LOST OPPORTUNITY FOR CLOSER COOPERATION BETWEEN THAILAND
AND BURMA AGAINST THE SHAN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS. THE
DELAY OF NEARLY A WEEK BEFORE THE BPP TROOPS WERE RELEASED
IMMOBILIZED A SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE BPP STRIKE
FORCE AIMED AT THE TRAFFICKERS AND CREATED A SITUATION IN
WHICH OTHER FORCES WERE UNWILLING TO DO ANYTHING MORE THAN
WAIT FOR THE OUTCOME OF THE INCIDENT. FURTHERMORE, THE
ADVERSE PUBLICITY GIVEN THE EVENT BY THE BURMESE, INCLUDING
THE ATTACHE TRIP TO VIEW THE "INVADERS," WAS SEEN BY SOME
AS A DELIBERATE ATTEMPT TO HUMILIATE THE THAIS. WE FEAR
THAT THE INCIDENT MAY NOW BE USED BY THE THAIS AS A
CONVENIENT EXCUSE TO EASE PRESSURES AGAINST THE SHAN
DISSIDENT GROUPS, WITH WHOM THEIR BASIC XYMPATHIES
ALREADY LIE.

4. ONE RTA OFFICER COMMENTED THAT ANY FUTURE JOINT OR
COORDINATED OPERATION WITH THE BURMESE SHOULD INCLUDE
LIAISON OFFICERS AT THE WORKING LEVEL ON BOTH SIDES
TO PREVENT THIS SORT OF MISUNDERSTANDING FROM RECURRING.
HOWEVER, WE EXPECT THAT IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE
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THERE WILL BE SOME RELUCTANCE IN THE NORTH TO PARTICIPATE
IN SIMILAR OPERATIONS OUT OF PIQUE AT THE BURMESE HANDLING
OF THIS PARTICULAR INCIDENT. WHILE THE THAIS RECOGNIZE
THEY WERE IN THE WRONG PLACE, MANY BELIEVE THE BURMESE
TOOK UNFAIR ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION.
TANNER

UNQUOTE
WHITEHOUSE

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